

NEWS

Elite NYC private schools are owned by ‘Chinese Communist Party boss’

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The four Basis Independent Schools in New York City -- two in Manhattan and two in Brooklyn -- charge up to \$44,000 a year but are owned by a Chinese Communist Party-run company.

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A group of elite private schools in Manhattan and Brooklyn is owned by a company headed by an executive named as a senior member of the Chinese Communist Party.

Basis Independent Schools, which has two campuses in each borough, charges up to \$44,500 a year and boasts that its graduates “gain entry into some of the world’s most prestigious colleges.”

Its Basis grades 3-12 school in Red Hook, Brooklyn, was ranked among the best college prep schools in private school rankings by Niche.

The other three schools are its pre-K-to-grade 2 school in downtown Brooklyn, pre-K-to-grade 5 on the Upper West Side, and grades 6-12 in Chelsea.

In 2019, the schools’ founders sold the schools to Spring Education Group, which is controlled by Primavera Capital Group, based in Hong Kong.

Primavera’s chairman and CEO is Fred Zulu Hu, a senior member of the Chinese Communist Party who is also a Harvard PhD graduate and a current adviser to it and Columbia University. Spring Education disputed that he is a Communist Party member but declined to offer any details of his political affiliation.



In Chelsea, Basis has its Manhattan upper school, offering grades 6 to 12. The company is owned by a Hong Kong

company whose CEO has been named as a Chinese Communist Party member.

Stefano Giovannini



Fred Hu, a Harvard graduate and member of the CCP, is the founder of Primavera Capital Group, a Hong Kong-based firm that owns the Basis Independent private schools in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

Primavera Capital's links to Basis were first highlighted in late September when Florida's Department of Education suspended public scholarships to other schools owned by Spring Education in the state, accusing them of ties to the CCP which were an "imminent threat" to students' and the public's welfare.

Through Spring Education, Hu's Primavera Capital bought out Basis' founders, Michael and Olga Block, for an undisclosed amount in 2019.

The couple, both economists, had established at least four Basis schools in China, according to the Basis Global website, before the deal.

Shortly afterward, the Blocks went on a property-buying spree, picking up an \$8.4 million penthouse in a Tribeca tower and a series of sprawling properties in their home state of Arizona, including a \$6.7 million “spacious modern masterpiece” estate in an upscale suburb of Phoenix.



Basis was founded by Michael Block (center) and his wife, Olga Block (right), economists who wanted to emulate rigorous curriculums they saw abroad. They are seen with Hadley Ruggles (left), former principal of the Red Hook school.

Paul Bruinooge/Patrick McMullan via Getty Images



Shortly after selling their Basis Schools to a company controlled by Fred Hu, economists Michael and Olga Block bought a sprawling condo in the 57-story tower designed by architects Herzog & de Meuron in Tribeca.

Under its ultimate owner's Communist CEO, Basis has expanded its network. Last year, it opened two Basis Independent Schools in Silicon Valley — where Spring Education has its headquarters.

There are now 10 Basis independent schools across the country.

And earlier this year, Primavera acquired test preparation company Princeton Review and online tutoring platform Tutor.com, continuing its drive into the education sector.

While Basis schools tell parents in a disclaimer that its parent company, Spring Education Group, is controlled by Primavera, which it says “is itself owned by Chinese persons residing in Hong Kong,” the schools do not acknowledge the Communist link.

A source with knowledge of the schools said there is “nothing covert or clandestine” about them, and that Primavera does not set the curriculum.



The chain offers grades 3 through 12 at its Red Hook site in Brooklyn.

Helayne Seidman

The schools are “carefully vetted by the federal government,” the source said, adding that Hu “has nothing to do with how the schools are run.”

Hu is a senior party member in China, a status which was first reported by the Financial Times. However, a spokesperson for Spring Education Group told The Post that Hu is not a member of the CCP.

But Hu has previously lectured at the Communist Party School in Beijing, and advised the Chinese government on debt restructuring.

He is also a member of the Hunan National Committee of the Chinese People’s Consultative Conference, a body which helps disseminate CCP messaging to other elite figures, including tech, academic and business leaders.

“This famous economist from Hunan is considered a ‘symbol of the world’ and one of China’s most influential investors,” according to a 2017 post on a CCP website.

Hu grew up in Hunan province, has a master's degree in engineering from Tsinghua University and a doctorate in economics from Harvard University, where he remains an adviser to both the Kennedy School and Harvard itself, through its global advisory council.



In downtown Brooklyn, Basis teaches pre-K to grade 2. Mandarin is on the curriculum at all the schools.

Stefano Giovannini

That is not his only connection to the US: He is also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations' "global advisory board," and an adviser to Columbia University's Jerome A. Chazen Institute of International Business.

Hu has also been a delegate to the World Economic Forum, which holds its annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland.

The WEF's website notes that "he initiated and led investment transactions" in companies such as Alibaba Group and ByteDance, the parent company of social media platform TikTok.

But last month, Spring Education's Communist ties came under scrutiny when Florida Gov. Ron

DeSantis' department of education moved against its four schools in the state, two in the greater Orlando area and two in greater Fort Lauderdale.

It announced that "through a thorough investigation," it had concluded that Lower and Upper Sagemont Preparatory Schools in Weston, Parke House Academy in Winter Park and Park Maitland School in Winter Park "have direct ties to the CCP and their connections constitute an imminent threat to the health, safety, and welfare of these schools' students and the public."



Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis took action against four Spring Education schools in the state, stripping them of state scholarship funds after concluding they were a risk to students' and the public's safety for their "CCP links."

AP

A spokeswoman for Spring Education, the parent company, told The Post that the company was not contacted in advance by the Florida governor's office.

"We ... are seeking more information regarding the basis for this decision," she said. "In the meantime, we will be working directly with our families to ensure they can remain enrolled in our schools."

In New York City, Mandarin is on the curriculum, and was before the Communist-backed purchase.

In 2016, students were invited to show their language skills to Chinese diplomats, with the school reposting an article from the China Press in 2016 praising their ability.

“At the Brooklyn location, students learn Mandarin with visual cues and songs,” the article said. “Students from every grade are happy to learn Mandarin and become conversational after one year of learning. The school also has a popular Chinese choir club in which students study and sing Chinese songs.”



Hu as a named Chinese Communist Party member owes fealty to the country's leader, Xi Jinping.

Getty Images

In addition, students participate in Lunar New Year celebrations, learn Chinese calligraphy and painting and analyze Chinese movies, according to a report.

The Basis network opened its first school in Tucson, Arizona, in 1998 after founders Michael Block, an economics professor, and his Prague-born wife, Olga, wanted a school that offered

the rigor that they had found in educational systems abroad.

“These schools are regularly acknowledged as one of the best private schools in our area and have a track record of delivering outstanding educational outcomes, which is why parents choose us,” the spokeswoman for Spring Education told The Post Tuesday.

“Our schools are locally run, abide by local, state and federal laws, and do not have ties to any government or political party, either foreign or domestic.”

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